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ABSTRACT

Skills that are currently referred to as study skills can be separated into two broad categories: techniques for study and applied study skills. Techniques for study could be acquired given sufficient information, but applied study skills require sequential skill development and practice on the part of students, using material near their reading/listening level. Thus, skills in these two categories require differential treatment if students are expected to apply them successfully. Ability to apply such skills can be measured with published or teacher-made instruments, but material used for assessing application--especially applied study skills--should be near the reading/listening level of the student. Both reading and content area instructors need to be involved in the task of helping students learn effective application of study skills. (Author)

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How to Teach Study Skills in High School and Community College

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How to Teach Study Skills in High School and Community College

In many of our high schools and community/junior colleges today, there is an apparent growth in the number of study assistance centers, learning assistance programs, learning resource centers, reading labs/centers, and adjunct study skills courses. All of these programs, centers, labs, and courses, implemented and instructed by professionals from various disciplines, are designed, though in diverse ways, to assist students in improving their study skills.

A sundry assortment of commercial materials is also being used to assist students in improving their study skills. Within such materials these skills are frequently labeled either study techniques, habits, or skills and are treated developmentally and in a sophisticated manner or superficially, offering little more than introductory over-views of such skills.

Since there are many educators with diverse backgrounds involved in this effort to help students improve study skills, as well as materials and treatment procedures, it is necessary to redefine what is meant by the term "study skills" in order to provide a point of reference for such a topic as "How to Teach Study Skills in High and Community College."

After reviewing current literature treating various aspects of study skills and perusing a wide variety of commercial material designed

to develop such skills, it becomes apparent that we might place what are commonly referred to as "study skills" into two broad categories:

1. Techniques for Study
2. Applied Study Skills

The first major category, Techniques for Study, would include such topics as:

1. how to schedule/plan one's time and organize the physical environment for study.
2. how to concentrate more effectively.
3. how to take tests (essay and objective) and reduce anxiety in test taking situations.
4. how to motivate oneself to study.

Such techniques can be learned through sources more informational in nature than skill oriented.

Both Courtney (1965) and Smith (1965) suggest that such techniques are assumed essential to competent application of study skills and are conducive to the best use of such skills, but are not appropriately categorized with study skills, which are used when one wants to do something with material heard or read.

Skills included in the second category, Applied Study Skills, would be the following, according to Bogue (1975):

1. Location Skills, necessary for immediate location of material and ideas
   a) locating information in a section/book

a) 1. table of contents

2. index

3. glossary

4. maps, tables, graphs, and charts

b) using library aids and resources as well as dictionaries

c) SQ3R

2. Organization Skills (or organizational output)

a) arranging material in proper sequence

b) notetaking

c) summarizing

d) outlining

e) organizing/collating/synthesizing information from various sources for reports and term papers

3. Recollection

a) reciting

b) memorizing

These skills need to be applied when one wants to do something with material heard or read. They require sequential skill development and practice on the part of the student using material at/near his level.

Considerations

All skills which are included in both categories are frequently labeled study skills, but need to be treated differently, if we are concerned with teaching study skills.

Those in the former category, Techniques for Study, can be applied after sufficient information concerning them has been conveyed. Discussion of such skills could be handled properly through a lecture and handout or possibly through a taped program with self-study orientation.

Skills within the latter category, Applied Study Skills, are of such a nature that they require more than self-study procedures and taped programs, if one is concerned with time spent by the student and efficient learning on his part. In order that students learn to apply skills of this type effectively and expediently, it is important that instructors teach such skills to students. Substantial reinforcement could be gained through self-study materials, but the instructional component offered through direct teaching procedures should be included in a study skills program, lab, center, or course.

Such intervention is required for Applied Study Skills because expedient and effective learning of such skills demands that instructors concern themselves with 1) individual reading and listening levels of students, 2) relevancy of material, and 3) sequential treatment of skills. They must also provide a sufficient number of practice exercises dependent on student needs.

Applied study skills need to be presented in material which is at/near the level of the student. It is only logical to assume that if a student is incapable of reading specific passages, he can do very little with such material. If such a student desires to improve Applied Study Skills, instructors should demonstrate application of such skills in material which he can read. If that material is far below the level of his regular college text, concurrent assistance in reading skills should be provided so that he might raise his reading level and gradually apply such skills to college level texts.

Not only do we need to be concerned with selecting material at the proper level, but we also need to discern the relevancy of the material selected. Whenever possible we should present Applied Study Skills within the context of regular content area material.
Such a procedure provides necessary relevancy and helps ensure the transfer of Applied Study Skills to actual textbooks read and lectures heard. Such direct application within textbook material should gradually lead students to experience improved performance in various subject areas.

For those students who are incapable of reading their texts, we need to present such skills in material devised to include some of the vocabulary and concepts presented in regular texts, but which is written at a lower reading level. Regular textbooks could be used later when students had improved their reading ability and needed demonstration of Applied Study Skills in higher level material.

In addition to reading levels and relevancy, we also need to be aware of the hierarchical nature of Applied Study Skills. The normal wish is to sequence instruction from the easy to the difficult processes, the former building a base for learning application of the latter. For example, if a student first learned effective application of the SQ3R technique, the learning of organization skills, such as outlining is facilitated. After he has learned application of organization skills, he then should proceed to learn and apply effective recollection skills. Thus effective location skills will expedite learning of organization skills, which will in turn facilitate application of recollection skills.

A fourth consideration for Applied Study Skills mentioned earlier was that time and practice exercises must be provided in order to ensure independence and habitual use on the part of the student. If an instructor merely presents or explains the skills, then recommends their application, it is unlikely that students will be equipped or motivated to apply such skills when reading their textbooks. As Herber (1970) suggested, an adequate number of practice exercises is imperative for actual skill development. Only if a student is given time and material for developing facility in skill application, will it become apparent to him that such procedures can lead to better performance in content area subjects.

Evaluation

In order to ascertain a student's level of competency in application of study skills, one must frequently observe and evaluate student performance.

If one is meeting the student for the first time or wants an objective measure of performance in addition to personal observation, one could utilize a variety of instruments designed for such purposes.

For Techniques for Study, one could use surveys/questionnaires such as the Survey of Reading/Study Efficiency or the Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes. One could also develop a questionnaire using items similar to those in published versions, in order to determine strengths and deficiencies in such areas as planning schedules, concentration, and the like.

In order to measure ability in the area of Applied Study Skills, one could use, in addition to surveys previously mentioned, available standardized instruments. However, it might be noted that very few published standardized tests are designed to measure all of the Applied Study Skills. Several standardized reading tests and achievement batteries include subtests on study skills, but they usually measure either location skills or organization skills.

Some instruments which could be used to assess location skills are the Comprehensive Tests Of Basic Skills, Forms Q and R, the Iowa Tests Of Educational Development, the SRA Reading Record, and the California Reading Test, Advanced, WXYZ Series. In addition to location skills

the California Reading Test measures knowledge of report outline forms, though it doesn't directly measure outlining or other organization skills.

An example of a test that measures outlining, an organization skill, but which does not measure location skills is the Educational Skills Test, English.

The Spitzer Study Skills Test assesses application of location skills and organization of facts in notetaking, so both location and organization skills are measured by this instrument. However, not all of the organization skills are included, so this test is also somewhat limited for measuring Applied Study Skills.

Thus, it seems that if one desired to use a standardized instrument to assess performance in the area of Applied Study Skills, it would be difficult to locate an independent measure for assessing all of the skills in this category.

Teacher-made instruments could be devised, however, for this purpose, or pre- and post-measures provided with commercially prepared material in the area of study skills could also be selected either in lieu of or in addition to standardized or teacher-made tests.

When selecting or devising maesuring instruments, however, it is as necessary as it is when teaching such skills to use listening or reading material near the student's level. For example, if one were assessing a student's ability to outline information, one should use material which the student can read and comprehend. If the material were far

above his reading level, his ability to outline would appear to be in need of development, while the real problem would be his inability to read the selection. Thus, one would have discovered little or nothing about his ability to outline.

Who Should Teach Study Skills?

It seems apparent that if all content area teachers would assume some of the responsibility for student practice and habitual application of study skills within the various subject areas, they would help students experience greater academic success. However, at the same time, one must realize that with a wide span of reading levels found within any one classroom (ten grade levels in many instances), content area teachers are limited in time for meeting individual reading needs, developing supplementary comprehension and vocabulary exercises, and teaching the content of the course. That is not to say that suggestions offered by Thomas and Robinson (1974), Herber (1970), and West (1974) should be ignored. Time, however, is a limiting factor and must be considered when instructors are meeting large heterogeneous classes. Likewise, learning resource centers, adjunct study skills courses, and reading improvement classes and labs can and should be organized to assist students in learning the Techniques for Study and Applied Study Skills. Combined efforts of both content area instructors and learning/reading instructors are necessary when the application of such skills in high school and college courses is the expected outcome. A diverse population of students makes such a coordination of efforts imperative.

Summary

Skills that are currently referred to as study skills can be separated into two broad categories 1) Techniques for Study and 2) Applied Study Skills. Techniques for Study could be acquired given sufficient information, but Applied Study Skills require sequential skill development and practice on the part of the student, using material near his reading/listening level. Thus, skills in these two categories require differential treatment if students are expected to apply them successfully.

Ability to apply such skills can be measured with published or teacher-made instruments, but material used for assessing application (especially Applied Study Skills) should be near the reading/listening level of the student.

Both reading/learning and content area instructors need to be involved in the task of helping students learn effective application of study skills.

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